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BRIEF ACCOUNT

OF THE

Society for propagating the Gospel among the *Indians* and others

IN

NORTH-AMERICA.

HISTORICAL SKETCH

OF THE

Inſtitution, Deſign, &c. of the Society for propagating the GOSPEL among the INDIANS and others in North-America.

BRITISH MUSEUM

IN the year 1762, a number of gentlemen aſſociated with the deſign of eſtabliſhing a ſociety ſimilar to that of which we are now about to give an account. They collected a large fund, and obtained a charter of incorporation from the government here, and began warmly and zealouſly to proſecute their pious and benevolent object. But, when the act of their incorporation was ſent to England for allowance, the Archbiſhop of Canterbury,* jealous leſt this ſhould interfere with the ſociety eſtabliſhed in Great-Britain, or perhaps unwilling that perſons not well affected to epiſcopacy ſhould obtain new influence and power by this means, obtained from the king a negative on the incorporating bill. It fell of courſe, and the zeal of its ſupporters in a great meaſure fell with it; for no more was heard concerning it till after the Revolution which made us an independent people.

In the year 1787, a commiſſion from the ſociety in Scotland, for propagating chriſtian knowledge, was received by a number of gentlemen in Boſton and its vicinity, to ſuperintend the funds of the ſociety which were devoted to chriſtianizing the aboriginal natives of America. Aſhamed that more ſolicitude for this object ſhould be diſcovered by foreigners than by themſelves, theſe gentlemen revived the former plan, and aſſociated for the purpoſe of forming a ſociety ſimilar to that in Scotland. They petitioned the General Aſſembly for a charter, which was granted them, with the adequate powers, at the cloſe of the ſame year, 1787.

Their next object was to raiſe ſuch funds as ſhould be neceſſary for the purpoſes which they had in view. Two methods occurred, as proper to be taken. One was, to obtain a Brief from the Aſſembly for a collection in all the churches of the ſtate. This was cheerfully granted; but it was by no means ſo productive as might have been expected,

* Jaſper Mauduit's letter to Mr. Bowdoin, dated April 7, 1763.

expected, the whole amount of it being only 1561 dollars and one cent. The other was a private ſubſcription among the members of the ſociety and other benevolent and pious perſons. This was adopted with more ſucceſs; ſo that now the funds of the ſociety, appropriated to their general purpoſes, yield an annual income of 338 dollars and 74 cents.

The late Hon. JOHN ALFORD, Eſq. of Charleſtown, in his laſt will, deviſed a large ſum of money to be devoted to the purpoſe of ſpreading the knowledge of the goſpel among the heathen. His executor, the late RICHARD CARY, Eſq. had never, till the incorporation of this ſociety, found any body of men to whom he might entruſt this ſum, with a proſpect of its being applied agreeably to the intentions of the donor. To them, however, he transferred it, and the annual income ariſing from it is 414 dollars and 36 cents.

In the diſpoſal of this money, the ſociety have conſulted the beſt intereſts of the Indians, to whom it is ſolely appropriated. They aſſiſt in the ſupport of the Rev. Mr. Mayhew of Martha's Vineyard, Mr. Hawley of Marſhpee, and Mr. Sargeant of New-Stockbridge, all of whom are miſſionaries to the Indians. On Martha's Vineyard they ſupport a number of ſmall ſchools for Indian children. The ſociety have alſo furniſhed to the ſchools which are ſupported by other means at Marſhpee, Oneida, and New-Stockbridge, books, paper, and every neceſſary. Believing that to civilize theſe people is one great and neceſſary ſtep towards chriſtianizing them, the ſociety have ſupplied the Indian inhabitants of New-Stockbridge with many implements of huſbandry, ſuch as ploughs, chains, and hoes. They have aſſiſted them in building ſchool-houſes and a houſe for their miniſter; and they have defrayed the expenſe of printing the aſſembly's catechiſm, which had been tranſlated into the language of theſe Indians. The ſociety have alſo been careful to diſtribute books upon pious and practical ſubjects, in ſuch numbers as they thought expedient and uſeful. In this way, ſince the firſt eſtabliſhment of the inſtitution, the Indians have received 38 bibles, 84 teſtaments, 150 ſpelling-books, 85 primmers, 48 Watts's pſalms and hymns, 18 pſalters, and 79 other books, amounting in the whole to 544.

Notwithſtanding the diſcouragements which have attended almoſt all the attempts to chriſtianize the Indians, the ſociety feel it to be their duty ſtill to continue them. Their funds will not admit of ſending miſſionaries into diſtant parts of the continent, or to ſeek out thoſe nations of Indians who are wholly unconnected with the white inhabitants. Their attempts are confined to thoſe tribes interſperſed among the white inhabitants, or in their neighbourhood. The wiſh of the ſociety is to propagate and cheriſh the ſpirit of Chriſtianity in the minds of theſe people, and, as their means and opportunity will admit, gradually to diſſeminate chriſtian knowledge among more diſtant tribes.

That part of the funds of the ſociety, which is not appropriated ſolely to the Indians, has

has been expended by them in purchaſing ſchool-books, and books of piety and devotion, which have been diſtributed among the poor inhabitants in the eaſtern parts of this commonwealth. This diſtribution has been followed with the beſt effects. Children have had the means of inſtruction, and perſons in more advanced life have had the ſerious impreſſions, early made upon their minds, revived and ſtrengthened, which they would otherwiſe have been in great danger of loſing in places where they cannot enjoy the advantage of attending upon the public inſtitutions and ordinances of Chriſtianity. In proſecution of theſe ſalutary purpoſes, the ſociety have given away, ſince the year 1787, 310 bibles, 768 teſtaments, 969 ſpelling-books, 634 pſalters, 1566 primmers, 94 of Watts's pſalms and hymns, 78 of Doddridge's Riſe and Progreſs of Religion in the Soul, and 4024 other books, moſtly pamphlets, but many large and valuable treatiſes, making in the whole (if we include what were given to the Indians) 8987. Some of theſe books have been given to the ſociety, in conſequence of their publickly requeſting the aid of pious and charitable perſons in effecting the purpoſes of their incorporation.

It will be obſerved that "Doddridge's Riſe and Progreſs of Religion in the Soul" is mentioned in the above catalogue of books given away by the ſociety, and the publick will have an idea of the nature of the practical books diſtributed when it is ſaid that they bear a very near reſemblance to this excellent treatiſe. Books of controverſy, never, in a ſingle inſtance, have entered the ſociety's catalogue; for their object is not to eſtabliſh modes and forms, nor to propagate any private or party ſyſtems; their object is, to promote the intereſts of true religion, and bring men to know and obey "the truth as it is in Jeſus."

It has been ſuggeſted, that theſe books have, in ſome places, been partially and improperly diſtributed. None of theſe complaints have been authenticated to the ſociety, and they hope that there is no foundation for them. They made it a rule, ſo long as it was found uſeful and practicable, to furniſh their miſſionaries with books to be diſtributed, according to their judgment, in the ſeveral places where they preached and baptized. When they had no miſſionaries, or when theſe gentlemen found it difficult to carry the books with them in journeys of ſome hundreds of miles, the ſociety ſent them to gentlemen of honour, character and abilities, in different places, requeſting them to take the trouble of furniſhing their poor neighbours according to their beſt judgment.—If, in any one inſtance, (and in more than one, the ſociety has no grounds for ſuſpicion), this has not been done, they can only expreſs their regret, and declare, that they always meant to employ perſons of integrity and virtue only, in this pleaſing office.

Miſſionaries were mentioned, in the laſt paragraph, as employed by the ſociety. Theſe miſſionaries were ſent to the vacant towns and plantations in the eaſtern parts of this commonwealth, and the ſociety have been enabled to ſend them by means of grants made to them by the General Aſſembly of this commonwealth. In conſequence of a

petition

petition from the ſociety, preſented in the year 1791, the treaſurer was directed to pay them five hundred dollars a year, for three years. An account of the manner in which this money had been expended was printed and laid before the General Court, January, 1795, with a petition, that the grant ſhould be continued: this was ſo far complied with as that the treaſurer was directed to advance five hundred dollars more to the ſociety. This they have expended in the following manner, viz.

	The ſum remaining of the former grant was	70 Dolls.
	Received of the treaſurer in 1796, - - -	500
		570
Paid in 1796.	To Rev. Mr. Coffin, - - - -	100
	Rev. Mr. Johnſon, - - - -	100
	Rev. Mr. Strickland, for a miſſion of 3 months,	150
In 1797.	To Mr. Coffin, - - - - -	100
	Rev. Mr. Eaton, - - - -	100
		550
	Remains of the grants,	20

The perſons whom the ſociety have employed as miſſionaries were either perſonally known to them, or were recommended by perſons in whom they could place confidence. They have reaſon to believe that their ſervices were uſeful; they know that they were acceptable. The people attended upon their miniſtrations with great readineſs and apparent ſatisfaction. They baptized great numbers of children and many adults. In ſeveral places they have gathered churches, and in more have eſtabliſhed and confirmed habits of regard to the duties and offices of religion which were formed before. Their diſcourſes and their converſation have tended to check the progreſs of error and vice, and to confirm the wavering. Full and grateful teſtimonials have been received by the ſociety from many places on theſe ſubjects; and earneſt requeſts preſented to them, that they would continue their attentions of this kind. Should the grants be continued by the General Aſſembly, (which they hope), theſe requeſts will be complied with.

The allowance made to the miſſionaries of fifty dollars a month will not be deemed extravagant, when it is ſaid, that they are always ordained miniſters, who have a charge at home, and a pulpit which they muſt ſupply. This, it is expected, they will do from their allowance; and they are charged alſo never to be burdenſome to the people among whom they miniſter, but to prove to them that a diſintereſted regard to their good alone has induced their viſit.

But,

But, the views of the ſociety, with reſpect to the manner in which their miſſions ſhould be conducted, will appear more plainly from the following copy of the inſtructions which are regularly given to all their miſſionaries, viz.

"To A. B. Miſſionary, &c.

"Rev. Sir,

"You will pleaſe to attend, during your miſſion, to the following inſtructions, adopted by the ſociety for propagating the goſpel among the Indians and others in North-America, and given to all their miſſionaries.

"Firſt. You will improve every opportunity of giving private and public religious inſtructions to the objects of your miſſion. You will not ſuffer a day to paſs, during the continuance of it, without attempts of this kind.

"Secondly. You will be careful to ſpend as little time as poſſible in places where the people enjoy the ordinances of religion. Thoſe who are without theſe privileges, the poor and the deſtitute, are the objects of your miſſion.

"Thirdly. You will not accept of any reward from thoſe to whom you miniſter, excepting neceſſary ſupport. Let the goſpel be preached freely.

"Fourthly. You will not, during your miſſion, attempt the purchaſe of lands, or any other ſecular buſineſs, leſt the people ſhould ſuppoſe that you are governed by intereſted motives in coming among them.

"Fifthly. You will keep a daily journal, from the time of your leaving home, of your proceedings, particularly a liſt of the baptiſms which you may adminiſter, and an exact account of the manner in which you diſtribute the books entruſted to your care. The ſociety wiſh you the preſence and bleſſing of Heaven; and in their name I ſubſcribe myſelf Your, &c.

"E. F. Secretary. C. D. Preſident."

It has been the cuſtom of the ſociety to advance one half of their allowance to the miſſionaries on their ſetting out, but not to pay the other till they have exhibited the journal required by the above inſtructions.

Conſcious that they have no other motive than a wiſh to do good, the ſociety ſubmit the above account of the manner in which they have diſcharged their truſt, to the General Aſſembly and to their fellow citizens. They may have erred in their judgments, but they know that their intentions have been pure. They aſk the aid of the government, and of the pious and munificent, to enable them to proſecute the objects of their inſtitution; and requeſt the prayers of all good men, that the bleſſing of Heaven may crown their endeavours with ſucceſs. *By order.*

Boſton, January, 1798. PETER THACHER, Secr'y.

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